

## Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

## Unity is Worth It

## Epistle Lesson

Ephesians 4:1-16 (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup> I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

<sup>7</sup> But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. <sup>8</sup> Therefore it is said, 'When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people.'

<sup>9</sup> (When it says, 'He ascended', what does it mean but that he had also descended<sup>[a]</sup> into the lower parts of the earth? <sup>10</sup> He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) <sup>11</sup> The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. <sup>14</sup> We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup> But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

## Bible/Sermon Focus

I am a Good Shepherd Story Teller for Children's Sunday School. Good Shepherd is a curriculum where we tell a Bible story using wooden figures. We don't change the story and we don't add to it. After we tell the story we propose "wondering questions." The story teller, as well as the Sunday School teachers, are told not to answer these questions. We don't want to sway the answers our children come up with. As they grow, their answers change, which is a good thing. Our children, like our adult groups do not always have the same answer. Similar to you all doing this Sermon Reflection Study, each person brings their own perspective.

In this week's sermon, Pastor Andy quoted John Wesley's paper titled The Character of a Methodist. "And I beseech you, by the mercies of God, that we be in no wise divided among ourselves. Is thy heart right, as my heart is with thine? I ask no farther question. If it be, give me thy hand. For opinions, or terms, let us not destroy the work of God. Dost thou love and serve God? It is enough. I give thee the right hand of fellowship."

Methodism is rooted a unity that is not conformity. In this series we have been focusing on just that. We looked at the story of Pentecost, of a God who meets people in their diversity, and uses these unique people to change the world. We considered through the story of Zacchaeus what it means that our savior saves us to, restores us to community. We are made one in the

Spirit, but we are not the same. Unity then requires us to have a bit of gentleness and compassion with each other. If we are in disagreement, extending the right hand of fellowship requires, in Wesley's terms, my heart to be right with your heart.

While telling the story of Zacchaeus in Good Shepherd, the kids and I were working through the wondering questions. We got to the last one, *"I wonder why Jesus decided to have dinner with a man who did so many bad things?"*

The first child to answer said something like, "because he didn't have any friends."

The next child, "because Jesus was mad at Zacchaeus for treating people badly and needed to tell him so."

The third child said, "Yes, both. Jesus was mad at Zacchaeus, but also Zacchaeus didn't have any friends. Jesus wanted to help Zacchaeus learn how to be a part of community again, because everyone needs community. Jesus was showing him how."

Everyone of these answers happened to come from kids in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. Our children are learning how to be theological thinkers. They are learning to think about God, and are being given our permission to do so. We do not require that they agree with us or each other. Like you, here in your Sermon Reflection Study, they make space for each other's answers. Unity in diversity is teachable. Creating theological thinkers is teachable. Compassion is teachable. Is your heart right? Give me your hand. Do you love God? That's enough.

## Discussion Questions

1. Reflect on the John Wesley quote from above.
2. When is unity difficult for you?
3. In Paul's words what does it mean for you to "lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called?"
4. Where does that calling intersect with our community at Manchester UMC?
5. When have you been at the whim of (or a part of) what Paul calls, "children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming." How did you and your community make things right again?

## Prayer

God of Unity, for the times when we have not met each other, our neighbors, creation, or you with the respect and right hand of fellowship they deserve, we ask your forgiveness. Teach us to be a tender, compassionate people, working for your Kin-dom on earth. We pray for the Children of Manchester UMC. May we support them in their discipleship and callings. Amen.

*"In our tradition, unity has always been a priority,  
and has never been about conforming."*